

I have to be honest, writing this valedictory address has been quite a daunting task. How do I express just how deeply I've been impacted by the place that has been my home for the last four years? I could stand up here and talk about the academic and social benefits, the convenient location or beautiful views, but you know all about that already. What I really want to do is talk a bit about the *heart* of Aquinas: about what this college really means and represents.

I think our first reading tonight really got to the core of that. Tobit told his son: "Do to no one what you would not want done to you." Centuries later, Jesus Christ rephrased that message in a way that might seem a little more familiar: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." We hear it so often that it almost seems banal. But in reality it is a profound and beautiful thing. Our purpose in life as students, as members of the workforce, as Aquinians and as human beings is, fundamentally, to love one another as we ourselves would wish to be loved in turn.

For those of you who don't know, I'm a Classics Major, so I have to read quite a lot of Greek philosophy. Now, those guys can be pretty boring a lot of the time, but one thing I think they really get right is the notion of love. For the Greeks, love isn't simply something that exists within people; it's something that inhabits the space between individuals, "in the interval between reach and grasp". Love isn't just a feeling; it's how we act, how we treat one another. Aquinas is something that really fosters that sort of active love. Something that encourages us to really go out of our way to show compassion, for our friends, for our peers, and for those less fortunate than ourselves.

This year, of course, this aspect of our community has been more apparent than perhaps ever before. COVID-19 has impacted our world in a devastating way and, while I'm sure you'll all agree that we've been very lucky here in South Australia, the pandemic has nonetheless touched our college on a deeply felt level.

But in typical Aquinas fashion, we managed to make the best of things. Indeed, to do more than that: to take a time of trial and turn it into an opportunity to express our ethos like never before.

It is one of the beautiful and consoling paradoxes of the human condition, I think, that it is in times of trial and uncertainty that we are afforded the opportunity to espouse the greatest love. It's a strange thing, but it is often in the midst of darkness that we most fully grow to appreciate the light.

Pandemic has not merely targeted people's physical health this year, but their spiritual health as well. The necessities of lockdown and social distancing have inflicted the pangs of loneliness upon many like never before. I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say we have been immensely grateful for the communal aspect of the college experience this year. Coming together for formal dinners, in support of HTC, or charitable causes, has meant none of us have felt isolated or alone. Simply knowing you have people to vent to over Uni stresses, or that you'll always be greeted around college with smiles and friendly faces is something I'm sure we no longer take for granted.

In essence, I guess the point I'm making tonight is that Aquinas isn't just a set of old buildings; it's not just a roof over our heads. Aquinas is a

*community*. And a community is defined by the people of which it is comprised. It is defined by all of you.

So, on behalf of my fellow valetants and myself, I'd like to express our gratitude to all of you who have shaped our lives as Aquinians over the last few years. To our fellow students: to our friends, whom we know we can rely on in all things, and to those who, in all sorts of simple ways, make this college a kind and vibrant place.

To the staff: to Brother Michael and to Carolyn, whose leadership has shaped our community into one that espouses compassion and understanding. To Sarah, whose enthusiastic academic guidance has impacted our study-lives in such an important way. To Steph and Mary in the front office, who always make us feel so very welcome. To Cassie. To Todd as Business Manager who works long and quietly. To the cleaners, the maintenance and kitchen staff, and to all others who have made this college really feel like a home away from home.

And of course, to our families. None of us would be here without your enduring love and support. Mum and Dad, I am so grateful to have you both here tonight, and I'm sure my fellow valetants feel just as privileged to have their guests here as well.

So thank you to everyone sitting here tonight. You've touched our lives in so many important ways, and we offer you our heartfelt thanks.

For those of you who are leaving college, we wish you all the very best. My fellow valetants, it's such a privilege to be up here with you tonight.

You're all such extraordinary people, and I know you're going to take the world by storm.

And to all of you staying on, we are glad to be leaving this college in such capable hands. I trust you will all live out our motto: "to shine and to burn": to enlighten with knowledge and enliven in faith. It is because of you that I am sure that spirit will neither flicker nor fade. It is because of people like you that I am sure Aquinas will continue to touch the lives of students and of our wider community in many ways and for many years to come.